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Further Information:

Cheryl Heppner cheppner@nvrc.org

**National Report Says Emergency Communication for Deaf
and Hard of Hearing People Gets Failing Grade**

WASHINGTON - December 10, 2004 A national report issued today calls attention to serious weaknesses in the nation's emergency preparedness infrastructure that compromise the safety and security of 28 million Americans who are deaf or hard of hearing. The report, "*Emergency Preparedness and Emergency Communication Access: Lessons Learned Since 9/11 and Recommendations*" is the work of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network (DHHCAN), a coalition of 16 national organizations of, by, and for deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind individuals, and the Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons (NVRC), a regional education and advocacy center with headquarters in Fairfax, VA.

One top priority identified by the report is the need for an effective system to receive emergency information that does not depend on the ability to hear. A second priority calls for active involvement of individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind in emergency planning processes, equipment testing, disaster exercises, training of public safety and security personnel, and community volunteer activities such as the Citizen Corps.

Recommendations to address these and other priorities are intended to build a national network. This network would have a knowledge bank of individuals and organizations to offer technical assistance, research, education, training, planning, advice and consultation, and development of model programs and services to tackle a wide range of needs.

"The Emergency Preparedness and Emergency Communication Access report represents an extensive summary of personal experiences by individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing on the fateful day of September 11, 2001 and thereafter under different circumstances," said Claude Stout, Chair of DHHCAN.

"We urge policymakers, technical innovators, and first responders to take heed of the recommendations in the report, and initiate action to fully involve all stakeholders in the processes of preparing for, coping with, and recovering from natural and man-made disasters," he said. "We are deeply grateful to Cheryl Heppner for her exemplary contributions in leadership and authorship, and over 2,000 individuals around the country who offered their testimonies as material for this report".

Excerpts from the report's Executive Summary:

- Hearing loss has a major impact on communication in emergencies because it is impossible to depend on auditory information. Sirens, shouted warnings, calls from rescue workers trying to locate people in rubble, knocks on doors to give urgent information, quick phone calls to give a heads-up about a developing

situation, radios, public address systems – all can be useless. Captioning of television and Internet news and coverage for text messages is not a given. Without effective systems, deaf and hard of hearing individuals do not know that there is an emergency, cannot learn what steps must be taken to protect themselves and others, and have no access to critical resources in the aftermath of an emergency.

- Developing an effective emergency communication system for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing will help everyone. In an emergency, many people with no hearing loss have difficulty hearing. The combination of stress and noise such as high winds, explosions, screams, or the roaring of a fire can make it impossible to hear well.
- Other weaknesses identified in the nation's emergency preparedness planning make it imperative for quick action to ensure that individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind are actively involved in community, regional, state, and federal emergency planning processes, equipment testing, disaster exercises, Community Emergency Response Team trainings, Citizen Corps activities, training of public safety and security personnel, and other activities. The involvement of individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind will tap into their tremendous talents and quickly help to increase understanding of their needs in a wide variety of areas.
- Emergency planners are setting up systems across the U.S. that do not take into account the unique needs of individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind. History has repeatedly shown that redesigning and adapting equipment, programs and services without taking these needs into account is almost always more expensive and rarely as effective.

The report is available in PDF version at the following websites:

National Association of the Deaf

www.nad.org/DHHCANer

Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons

<http://www.nvrc.org/MediaLibrary/DHHCANEmergencyReport.pdf>

Telecommunications for the Deaf Inc.

<http://www.tdi-online.org/tdi/emergencypreparedness/emergencypreparedness.htm>

For a text version, contact cheppner@nvrc.org.

ABOUT DHHCAN

Established in 1993, DHHCAN serves as the national coalition of organizations representing the interests for deaf and/or hard of hearing citizens in public policy and legislative issues relating to rights, quality of life, equal access, and self-representation. DHHCAN also provides a forum for proactive discussion on issues of importance and movement toward universal, barrier-free access with emphasis on quality, certification and standards.

DHHCAN ORGANIZATIONS

American Association of the Deaf-Blind: www.aadb.org

American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association www.adara.org

Association of Late-Deafened Adults: www.alda.org

American Society for Deaf Children: www.deafchildren.org

Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf: www.ceasd.org
Communication Service for the Deaf: www.c-s-d.org
Deaf Seniors of America: www.deafseniors.org
Gallaudet University: www.gallaudet.edu
Gallaudet University Alumni Association: <http://alumni.gallaudet.edu/>
National Association of the Deaf: www.nad.org
National Black Deaf Advocates: www.nbda.org
National Catholic Office of the Deaf: www.ncod.org
Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf: www.rid.org
Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc.: www.tdi-online.org
USA Deaf Sports Federation: www.usadsf.org
The Caption Center/WGBH: <http://main.wgbh.org/wgbh/pages/mag/>

ABOUT NVRC

Founded in 1989, NVRC's mission is to empower deaf and hard of hearing individuals and their families through education, advocacy and community involvement. Its primary service area is the metropolitan region of Northern Virginia. It has been a national leader in research on the experiences of deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf-blind in emergencies.

Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons: www.nvrc.org

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